

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-10 DHA-02 ORM-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04

SIL-01 /087 W

----- 111869

R 051419Z SEP 75

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1097

INFO USCINCSO

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 3870

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, HO

SUBJECT: POLITICAL PARTY REACTION TO GOVERNMENT PROHIBITION
AGAINST MEETINGS

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 3761

BEGIN SUMMARY. THE NATIONALIST AND LIBERAL PARTIES CONDEMNED THE GOVERNMENT BAN ON POLITICAL MEETINGS AND PROTESTED THE ACTION TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONS OF THE UN AND THE OAS. SEVERAL LT. COLONELS STATED PUBLICLY THAT THEY ARE IN FAVOR OF A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY, BUT ONLY AFTER THE PRESENT SERIOUS PROBLEMS CONFRONTING THE COUNTRY HAVE BEEN RESOLVED. IT APPEARS THAT A NECESSARY PRECONDITION FOR THE CALLING OF FREE ELECTIONS WILL BE THE REMOVAL OF RICARDO ZUNIGA AGUSTINUS AND MODESTO RODAS ALVARADO FROM THEIR PRESENT POSITIONS AS LEADERS OF THE NATIONALIST AND LIBERAL PARTIES. END SUMMARY.

1. REFTTEL DESCRIBED NATIONALIST PARTY DECLARATION THAT
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CRITICIZED GOVERNMENT'S USE OF POLICE FORCE IN THE CHOLUTECA AREA TO IMPEDE POLITICAL MEETINGS. THE GOVERNMENT REPLIED TO THE DECLARATION ON AUGUST 28. ITS MAIN POINTS FOLLOW:

(A) IT IS FALSE THAT MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES HAVE SEARCHED RESIDENCES IN THE DHOLUTECA REGION;

(B) THE GENERAL DISARMING OF THE REGION WAS ORDERED BY THE HIGH COMMAND TO PREVENT ACTS OF VIOLENCE WHICH COULD OCCUR AS A RESULT OF THE SYSTEMATIC AGITATION OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES;

(C) THE CLIMATE OF INSECURITY WAS CREATED BY THE PLAN OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES TO HOLD MEETINGS AND A CLIMATE OF PEACE RETURNED WHEN THE MEETING WAS BANNED;

(D) IT IS ABSURD TO STATE THAT CHOLUTECA IS LIVING UNDER A VIRTUAL STATE OF SIEGE; AND

(E) THE ARMED FORCES GUARANTEE PUBLIC LIBERTIES AND WILL BE VIGILANT TO PREVENT ACTS OF DISORDER OR VIOLENCE.

2. THE LIBERAL AND NATIONALIST PARTIES SENT CABLES TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONS OF THE UN AND THE OAS ON AUGUST 29. THEY STATED THAT THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT HAD PROHIBITED POLITICAL GATHERINGS, THUS VIOLATING THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE TO HOLD PEACEFUL PUBLIC MEETINGS. THEY POINTED OUT THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION IS IN FLAGRANT DISREGARD OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS ABOUT THE RIGHTS OF MEN. THE CABLES CALLED ON THE ORGANIZATIONS TO SHOW "SOLIDARITY" WITH THE POLITICAL PARTIES.

3. CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR STATED AGAIN ON MAY 2 THAT POLITICAL MEETINGS ARE PROHIBITED ON THE BASIS OF THE DECEMBER 4, 1972 DECREE THAT ESTABLISHED A MILITARY GOVERNMENT. MINGOV FLORES GUERRA WARNED THE POLITICAL PARTIES FOR THE FOURTH TIME AGAINST HOLDING POLITICAL MEETINGS. FLORES SAID THAT THE ARMED FORCES ARE IN FAVOR OF A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY BUT ONLY AFTER NECESSARY SOCIO-ECONOMIC MEASURES HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED. LT. COL. MARCO ROSALES ABELLA, COMMANDER OF IV REGION AROUND CHOLUTECA, SAID IN A PRESS INTERVIEW THAT HE WAS IN FAVOR OF A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY; HOWEVER, THIS COULD NOT BE ACCOMPLISHED UNTIL THE PRESENT GRAVE PROBLEMS FACING THE NATION ARE RESOLVED. HE SAID THAT THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES
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SHOULD RENOVATE THEMSELVES SO THAT YOUNGER ELEMENTS COULD COME TO THE FORE. LT. COL. ROLANDO MEJIA GARRIGO, COMMANDER OF THE 5TH BATTALION IN COMAYAGUA, STATED THAT HE WAS IN FAVOR OF A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY BUT ONLY WHEN CONDITIONS WOULD PERMIT. HE IMPLIED THAT HE WAS NOT IN FAVOR OF THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP OF THE PARTIES.

4. ROBERTO GALVEZ BARNES, EX-AMBASSADOR TO THE US, STATED IN A PRESS INTERVIEW THAT THE LIBERAL AND NATIONALIST PARTIES SHOULD EXERT ALL THEIR EFFORTS TOWARD BRING ABOUT JUST AND DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS. HE POINTED OUT THAT ALMOST ALL THE MILITARY LEADERS WHO HAVE COMMENTED ABOUT THE SITUATION HAVE INDICATED THEIR DESIRE FOR AN EVENTUAL RETURN TO

CONSTITUTIONALITY. HE OBSERVED THAT THE REAL QUESTION AT ISSUE IS WHEN IT WOULD BE APPROPRIATE TO HOLD SUCH ELECTIONS. MAX VELAZQUEZ DIAZ, EX-PRESIDENT OF THE LIBERAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, STATED THAT THE PROHIBITION AGAINST HOLDING THE MEETING CHOLUTECA WAS UNINTELLIGENT. HE SAID THAT THE PROHIBITION WAS ILLEGAL AND THAT THE PARTIES SHOULD CONTINUE WITH THEIR MEETINGS. EX-FONMIN JORGE FIDEL DURAN COMMENTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD NO RIGHT TO PROHIBIT PARTY MEETINGS AND SAID THERE IS NO LEGAL BASIS FOR THE BAN. REDOLFO ABELLA ROSALES AND RAFAEL BARDALES BUESO, PRESIDENTS OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEES OF THE LIBERAL AND NATIONALIST PARTIES, CONDEMNED THE PROHIBITION AND PROMISED THAT THE PARTIES WOULD CTNTINUE THEIR PREPARATIONS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS.

5. LA NOTICA AND LA PRENSA HAVE BEEN SUPPORTING THE POLITICAL PARTIES IN THEIR COMPAIGN FOR FREE ELECTIONS AND A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY. IN REPEATED EDITORIALS THEY HAVE CALLED THE GOVERNMENT BAN ON MEETINGS UNWISE AND AN ATTACK ON CIVIL LIBERTIES. EL DIA AND TIEMPO, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAVE OFTEN BEEN CRITICAL OF THE PARTIES BECAUSE THE PARTIES HAVE NOT OFFERED ANY NEW PROGRAMS TO DEAL WITH PROBLEMS CONFRONTING THE COUNTRY. THEIR VIEW IS THAT A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY IS A SHAM IF IT IS NOT ACCOMPANIED BY A PLAN TO DEAL WITH THOSE PROBLEMS.

6. POLOFF RECENTLY HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS THE SITUATION WITH RICARDO ZUNIGA AGUSTINUS, LEADER OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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NATIONALIST PARTY. HE SAID THAT THE PARTIES WOULD DO EVERYTHING THEY COULD TO HAVE MEETINGS IN VARIOUS CITIES AS PREVIOUSLY PLANNED. HE COMMENTED THAT, IF NECESSARY, THEY WILL BE HELD IN BUILDINGS RATHER THAN IN THE STREETS OR SQUARES. ZUNIGA POINTED OUT THAT HE DID NOT BELIEVE THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD OR WOULD CONVOKE ELECTIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE; HOWEVER, HE SIAD THAT DEVELOPING PRESSURES COULD EVENTUALLY CAUSE THE GOVERNMENT TO CALL FOR ELECTIONS IN APPROXIMATELY TWO YEARS.

7. COMMENT. THE GOVERNMENT HAS OVERREACTED TO THE PLANNED MEETINGS OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES. AS POINTED OUT BY RAMON VILLEDA BERMUDEZ, SON OF EX-PRESIDENT VILLEDA, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN MORE INTELLIGENT TO IGNORE THE MEETINGS RATHER THAN BAN THEM. THE PARTIES CAN NOW SAY THAT THE GOVERNMENT FEARS THEIR ACTIVITIES TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT IT WAS COMPELLED TO PROHIBIT THE MEETINGS AND CAN POSE AS DEFENDERS OF "CIVIL RIGHTS" AGAINST AN AUTHORITARIAN REGIME. IN A VERY REAL SENSE THERE IS A GENERAL AGREEMENT AMONG THE LT. COLONELS THAT THERE SHOULD BE AN EVENTUAL RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY. THE REAL QUESTION IS WHEN THIS CAN BE DONE AND UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES. BEFORE THAT CAN COME

ABOUT IT WILL BE NECESSARY FOR THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES TO
CHANGE THEIR PRESENT LEADERSHIP AND ADAPT SOCIO-ECONOMIC
PROGRAMS THAT ARE RESPONSIVE TO THE NEEDS OF HONDURAN
SOCIETY. THERE IS NO QUESTION BUT THAT ZUNIGA AND MODESTO
RODAS ALVARDO, LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY, ARE ANATHEMA
TO MOST OF THE LT. COLONELS. IT APPEARS THAT A NECESSARY
PRECONDITION FOR THE CALLING OF FREE ELECTIONS WOULD BE THE
REMOVAL OF ZUNIGA AND RODAS AND THEIR REPLACEMENT BY
LEADERS WHO ARE ACCEPTABLE TO THE MILITARY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 26 AUG 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS, POLITICAL REPRESSION, PARTY MEETINGS, POLICE POWERS, POLITICAL PARTIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 05 SEP 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975TEGUCI03870
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: 11652 GDS
Errors: n/a
Film Number: D750308-0491
From: TEGUCIGALPA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t197509106/baaaaefb.tel
Line Count: 175
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08 SEP 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <14 NOV 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: n/a
TAGS: PINT, HO
To: STATE INFO USCINCSO
SAN SALVADOR
GUATEMALA
MANAGUA
SAN JOSE
Type: TE

Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006